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VOL. XXIII
AUTUMN 1973

No. 1
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AUTUMN, 1973

PUBLISHED BY THE FACULTY OF LA SALLE COLLEGE

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Marginalia . . .

VIEWS ON REVIEWS

From time to time we have given some thought to adding a regular book review department to this magazine. The idea is especially tempting when we receive review copies of new books by our contributors, books like the recent story collections by Ann Jones and H. E. Francis. Other than the always present pressures of space, the only good reason for not using book reviews is this editor's ambivalent feelings about them.

If I were the author of a new book, I'm sure I'd be thirsting after reviews, especially complimentary ones that would trumpet my genius to an unknowing world. But the book review is a strange animal, even in the zoo of the publishing world.

The reviewer is usually severely limited in wordage and in time. He receives his copy of the book and his deadline. He has a week or even two to read the book and distill its essence in a choice thousand words or less. If he is really into the reviewing game, he may be reading two or three books at the same time, and there is not much room for pondering and re-reading. He must make up his mind and take the plunge into print with words he may later regret.

In the world of scholarly book reviewing, the time pressures are not so extreme, but there are other kinds of gamesmanship at work. Scholarly book reviews usually go to someone working in the same field. Mayhap someone you know. Of course you are not to be influenced by the fact that you know old Charlie is up for tenure and your review is likely to be read by some board or other that may never get around to reading old Charlie's book. And of course you would never be swayed by the fact that some promotion-seeking assistant prof at Ho-Ho-Kus State has rushed into print with some ideas that you've been carefully collecting 3x5 cards on for the past twenty years! You would never be swayed in the academic objectivity of your review by such trifling matters. Of course you wouldn't.

To get a little perspective on this reviewing business, I decided to look at the reviews given some recognized American classics of the last century. I think there is general agreement that the three greatest novels to come out of 19th century America were Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, and Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. I had a look at some of the reactions each elicited from contemporary reviewers.

(Continued on Page 51)

The Hero and the Anti-Hero in Fiction

The Evolution of the
Contemporary Protagonist

E. ANTHONY JAMES

THAT THE PROTAGONISTS of most major fiction written since World War II differ clearly from their immediate literary predecessors and still more radically from their precursors in novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is perhaps sufficiently self-evident to constitute a truism. Indeed, these differences are glaring enough to have earned the contemporary protagonist a variety of labels seemingly intended to distinguish him from his fictional forerunners: he is designated, for example, as the alienated hero, the underground hero, the victim hero, the loser hero and, most frequently as the anti-hero.

On the face of it, one might suspect that today's protagonist has somehow sprung whole cloth into being as a uniquely contemporary phenomenon, and that his seemingly sudden emergence presupposes an abrupt and revolutionary departure from traditional concepts of the heroic. The thesis I wish to enforce, however, is that the contemporary hero (or anti-hero) has nevertheless *evolved* in a reasonably predictable fashion into his present form, that he has in fact been progressing gradually but steadily and discernibly towards that form since the nineteenth century, and that he is clearly prefigured in much earlier fiction which focuses on issues of conduct and class, on the individual's role in and relation to society.

But before this question of the evolution of the contemporary protagonist can be addressed, it is necessary to review some of the salient traits which differentiate him from his fictional antecedents. In traditional novels of conduct and class, particularly those of the eighteenth century, the protagonist is apt to begin as an attractive but disadvantaged person of humble origins, often orphaned or of illegitimate birth. If the novel has a happy ending, it usually shows us how the protagonist, through

virtue, energy, intelligence and pluck, triumphs over adversity, his goodness and perseverance being rewarded with blissful, generally advantageous matrimony, riches, respectability and community standing. The narrative formula is simple: the social outsider wins accommodation and becomes an insider. The erstwhile pariah assumes his rightful place in the establishment, joins Rotary, and lives happily ever after. He is a winner, or, if the novel is tragic, he usually dies admirably trying to become one.

But clearly we witness a different pattern in contemporary equivalents of the traditional novel of conduct and class, and that difference is most starkly apparent in the nature of the protagonist himself. Not only does the contemporary hero lack the sterling qualities of his novelistic predecessors, but he is also often extravagantly supplied with their opposites. Instead of being handsome, brave, virtuous, resourceful and self-confident, he is likely to be ugly, cowardly, dishonest, fumbling and neurotic. He is, in a word, a *loser*. And yet he is meant not just to engage our sympathy, but also to win our respect and admiration—to earn precisely the accolades accorded the traditional hero, but somehow to do so in a most unheroic and most untraditional way.

Furthermore, the career of the contemporary protagonist differs radically as well. Instead of progressing from the bottom to the top, from the outside to the inside like his predecessors, he often begins in a reasonably settled, secure and respectable position only to move inexorably down and out and to finish stripped of mate, money, job and status, bereft of precisely the temporal rewards sought and achieved by so many earlier protagonists. Today's hero thus frequently ends where his precursors began, but—and the distinction is important—unlike them he may be expected not only to accept, but also to be content with his outcast lot. For if, as one of the dispossessed, he has registered substantial social and material losses, he has nonetheless made more valuable if less tangible gains—in self-knowledge, compassion, ethical insight, understanding of the human condition, and the like. Thus it is precisely in becoming a loser by all social and material standards that the contemporary hero in other senses *wins* and even achieves a kind of heroic stature.

Needless to say, such changes in concepts of the hero and the hero's progress do presuppose changes in concepts of virtue and its appropriate rewards. Clearly, for today's writers, the social and material attainments once accepted as desirable are no longer construed as such. More important, contemporary authors often scorn the characteristic forms of human activity

on which temporal success is predicated and the characteristic types of human nature with which it is associated. But such advocacy of an essentially unwordly orientation, is, of course, hardly unique to contemporary novels. In fact, from the nineteenth century on, the fictional protagonist is likely to discover that the game dictated by his earthly ambition is indeed not worth the candle, and his heroism is frequently measurable in terms of the force with which he first registers that awareness and then attempts to live by it, usually as an outsider willing to sacrifice social and material rewards for less tangible benefits. Such alienation is certainly *the* characteristic posture of the contemporary anti-hero. But it has nevertheless also been *one* highly characteristic posture of a great many nineteenth and twentieth-century fictional heroes as well. What chiefly distinguishes the contemporary anti-hero from such forerunners, however, are the flagrant, often violent or shocking guises in which his alienation is manifested, as well as the equally extreme causes, usually rooted deeply in his very nature, of that alienation.

To return to my original thesis, the anti-heroic protagonists of contemporary, post-1945 fiction may *seem* at first glance to differ radically from their traditional antecedents, but the difference is in fact a matter of degree rather than kind, and is truly radical only if we compare them to their earliest forerunners, namely to the protagonists of eighteenth-century novels of conduct and class. And that, I suggest, is because eighteenth-century novelists were seldom inclined to question the value of wealth, status, security and respectability, let alone, in some instances, the methods employed in attaining them. For many authors of the period, to provide an underprivileged but deserving protagonist with membership in the establishment was to bestow upon him the ultimate reward. And in general, typical eighteenth-century heroes are accordingly furnished with personal charm, attractiveness, resourcefulness, energy and intelligence—the sort of equipment, in short, which helps to guarantee social and material success. Moreover, some authors of the period permitted the protagonist considerable ethical latitude in his efforts to achieve a social station compatible with his merit and ability.

THIS POINT is particularly obvious in the case of the protagonists of Daniel Defoe, whose personal quest for riches and middle-class gentility often led him into positions quite as morally dubious as those into which he invariably thrusts his heroes and heroines. Defoe clearly believed that worldly ambition was not only justifiable in itself, but also justified extravagant

departures from the path of conventional morality, and the author's worldly values are pointedly shared by his heroine, Moll Flanders.

From the outset of the narrative, Moll is an outsider hungrily craving security, respectability and social accommodation. She is born in Newgate of a mother subsequently transported to America for theft. She is taken in and reared until she is eight by a kindly old lady in Colchester, whose household is modest but genteel. There, even as a child, Moll conceives an active dread of being put out to service. When the old woman dies, Moll is accepted into the home of a Colchester family of means, where she grows into young womanhood. Her vanity is fired both by her recognition that she is more attractive than the daughters of the house and by her ability, through imitation alone, to excel them in all the genteel accomplishments inculcated by a parade of visiting tutors. She soon develops a compulsion—the term is not too strong—to become a gentlewoman, and Defoe implies that it is only natural and just that his heroine, on discovering that she is both more talented and more beautiful than the privileged daughters of wealth, should covet the life of ease, security and gentility for which they are being groomed.

From this point on, her craving to become a gentlewoman becomes the primary motivating force in Moll's life. It first leads her into an obsessive quest for advantageous matrimony, one whose success she helps to insure by circulating false rumors of a vast personal fortune: "I was resolved now to be married or nothing, and to be well married or not at all," she announces, adding that her "subtle game" consisted of singling out, from among the suitors attracted by her fictitious wealth "the man who was most likely to depend upon the hearsay of a fortune, and not inquire too far into the particulars."¹ It leads her to settle for being well kept during periods when being well married is denied her. And, after she has exhausted a succession of husbands and lovers, borne children too numerous to count and lost her looks, it leads her into a new career of highly successful thievery. Larceny, according to her genteel code, seems infinitely preferable to honest toil. When Moll is at last apprehended and repents, Defoe rewards her reformation with precisely the sort of wealth and gentility she has always sought. She is reunited with the one man she truly loves, Jemmy, her highwayman husband. They are transported to America where Moll, capitalizing on earlier colonial connections, amasses a fortune, and the

¹ Moll Flanders, Modern Library ed. (New York: Random, 1950), pp. 52, 70.

couple return to England where they pass a comfortable and respectable old age.

I do not suggest that Defoe flatly excuses all that Moll does in her quest for wealth and gentility, but he is clearly sympathetic. And if he does in fact condemn Moll and his other, similarly ambitious heroes and heroines, he seemingly also asks, as one commentator suggests, for "a suspended sentence and even, in some cases, a full pardon."²

HENRY FIELDING was less inclined than Defoe to sympathize with worldly ambition, let alone to countenance the kinds of dishonest and egocentric behavior which it often prompts in Defoe's protagonists. In fact, three of Fielding's best known characters, Abraham Adams, the unappreciated and penurious parson, Joseph Andrews, the persecuted servant, and Tom Jones, the long-suffering foundling, are notable for their lack of social and material appetite and their philosophic acceptance of relatively miserable circumstances. Nevertheless, these characters, like Defoe's, all move from initially disadvantaged positions to comfortable situations as members of the establishment, and Fielding seemed no more predisposed than Defoe to doubt the value of such tangible compensation.

Thus Jones, the orphaned bastard, is cruelly punished for his own indiscretions and suffers severe torments at the hands of such active adversaries as Thwackum, Square and Blifil. But, with a few minor ethical lapses along the way, he perseveres, sound in head and heart, and finally attains the rewards he deserves. The surprise revelation that he is not a nameless bastard, but the son of Bridget and the nephew of Squire Allworthy, sweeps away the social obstacle barring his marriage to Sophia Western. He is happily reconciled with Allworthy and marries Sophia; Squire Western resigns the greater part of his considerable estate to his son-in-law, and Tom's personal fortune is further augmented by Allworthy's liberality. We last glimpse Tom and Sophia safely established on a highly secure and respectable footing, revered by servants, tenants, neighbors and relatives alike.

Fielding confers similar social and material blessings on Parson Adams and on that footman of parts, Joseph Andrews.

² G. A. Starr, *Defoe and Casulistry* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. vi. For a more detailed discussion of Defoe's attitude toward the worldliness and pragmatic ethics of Moll and his other protagonists, see my *Daniel Defoe's Many Voices: A Rhetorical Study of Prose Style and Literary Method* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1972), pp. 153-156, 201-229.

Like Tom, Joseph is handsome, athletic, intelligent and good-hearted. Like Samuel Richardson's Pamela, the fictional sister he parodies, he resists the amorous overtures of his employer (Lady Booby being an ironic counterpart of Richardson's Mr. B), but unlike Pamela, he is as a result summarily and brutally cashiered. After enduring many sufferings, the virtuous Joseph is reunited with his beloved Fanny, and, in another surprise revelation of parentage, discovers that he is the son not of the servant-class Andrews but rather of the gentleman, Mr. Wilson. He and Fanny marry, and with the Wilsons they settle down to the easeful lives of country gentry, Joseph establishing a modest estate with the 2,000 pounds conferred upon Fanny by his father. And even Parson Adams at last receives the material compensation and recognition to which his ecclesiastical merits entitle him. Mr. Booby presents him with a living of 30 pounds a year, which enables him to keep a curate.

And so it goes. Oliver Goldsmith's Dr. Primrose, the Vicar of Wakefield, regains his lost status, wealth and respectability and acquires a powerful patron and relative by marriage in Sir William Thornhill. Richardson's Pamela is elevated from her serving-girl status through marriage to Mr. B, perhaps a dubious attainment in the eyes of the modern reader, but one whose unalloyed merit Richardson does not choose to question. Despite her parents' impropriety and lack of wealth, Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennet snares Fitzwilliam Darcy and becomes mistress of Pemberley, his splendid estate.

Thus in these highly typical eighteenth-century novels of conduct and class, we leave the protagonists just as they achieve the status, wealth, security and respectability to which their talents and virtues entitle them. Once again, in representative novels of the period, the outsider becomes the insider, the hero wins the temporal rewards he deserves, and the authors do not doubt the solid value of those rewards, nor in the case of Defoe, question severely the means employed in achieving them.

But it seems to me that it is precisely a growing authorial tendency to question both such ends and the means to them which chiefly distinguishes nineteenth-century novels of conduct and class from those of the eighteenth. One could cite a great many illustrations of this tendency, but I shall concentrate on just two exceptionally representative ones—Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and Dickens' *Great Expectations*.

THACKERAY'S Becky Sharp, as an articulated, charity pupil at Miss Pinkerton's academy for young ladies, is every bit as conscious of her superior parts as was Moll Flanders among the prosperous and privileged daughters at Colchester. Like Moll, Becky is prepared to go to lengths to acquire the place in society which she believes her looks and abilities entitle her to occupy. Indeed, her goals virtually duplicate those of Defoe's heroine: both women crave the status and security which advantageous matrimony can provide, and both share the same handicap—a lack of dowry, of parental assistance, of influential connections to help them to achieve it. Both have only their own resourcefulness to depend upon. As Thackeray observes in connection with Becky's early matrimonial pursuit of Jos Sedley, "Miss Sharp had no kind parent to arrange these delicate matters for her, and . . . if she did not get a husband for herself, there was no one else in the wide world who would take the trouble off her hands," and again, "poor dear Rebecca had all this work to do for herself."³ Becky is thus distinguished from her friend Amelia Sedley, that vapid nincompoop who, as the daughter of wealthy, respectable and protective parents, is virtually guaranteed a husband of means and standing.

At the outset, Thackeray seems to admire the realism with which Becky recognizes the obstacles she faces and the energy and ingenuity which she marshals to surmount them. But, unlike Defoe, he soon begins to imply that Becky's increasingly extravagant worldly goals are simply not worth the expenditures of innocence and talent she lavishes upon the pursuit of them, and that compulsive ambitiousness transforms Becky, who is at first an amiable and sympathetic if artful little opportunist, into something of a monster. And if Thackeray admires Becky's resourcefulness much as Defoe admired Moll's, he is careful to show nevertheless that his heroine's connivings take on an increasingly vicious cast which reflects the progressive deterioration and distortion of her values. Thus he informs us that Becky "wept some of the most genuine tears that ever fell from her eyes" (Chap. XIV, p. 144) upon learning that her clandestine marriage to Rawdon Crawley, who is basically a decent and certainly a loving husband, has cancelled an unexpected opportunity to marry his wealthier, titled father, the aging, lecherous and truly repulsive Sir Pitt, whose savage treatment of his recently deceased wife Becky herself has witnessed. In the society of the day, Thackeray comments, matrimonial values are such

³ *Vanity Fair*, Modern Library ed. (New York: Random, 1950), Chap. III, p. 18, Chap IV, p. 25. Subsequent references appear in the text.

that a Henry VIII or a Bluebeard would have no difficulty in acquiring an attractive tenth wife (Chap. IX, p. 81).

Similarly, Becky's warped desire to cultivate aristocratic connections plunges her into a probably adulterous, at best compromising, relationship with the equally repulsive Lord Steyne, in the course of which, because he simply gets in the way, she behaves with near sadism toward her little boy. Again and again Thackeray demonstrates that Becky is increasingly disposed to stoop to ever greater depths—perhaps, it is hinted, even to murder—in order to achieve social and material success. He pictures her as “writhing and pushing onward towards what they call ‘a position in society,’ and the servants were pointing at her as lost and ruined” (Chap. XLIV, p. 462). Even Lord Steyne tries to apply the brakes to her accelerating ambition: “You’ve got no money, and you want to compete with those who have,” he cautions her. “You poor little earthenware pipkin, you want to swim down the stream along with the great copper kettles. All women are alike. Everybody is striving for what is not worth the having!” (Chap. XLVIII, pp. 498-499). And when we see Becky, abandoned, friendless and destitute after the break-up of her marriage, Thackeray editorializes thus: “All her lies and her schemes, all her selfishness and her wiles, all her wit and genius, had come to this bankruptcy” (Chap. LIII, p. 556).

In the end, of course, Becky does attain the security and respectability she has always coveted; she busies herself in works of piety, attends church with a footman, patronizes the fashionable charities—in short performs by rote all the empty rituals associated with “a position in society.” But the final irony lies in Thackeray's clear implication that Becky would have been far happier leading the Bohemian life to which she was born than in the station of genteel status she has wasted so much energy, ingenuity, and, above all, innocence, to attain.

CHARLES DICKENS preaches much the same sermon in *Great Expectations*. Once Pip is exposed, as a young boy, to the dubious attractions of Satis House and the even more fatal ones of Estella, who patronizes him ruthlessly, his former contentment with his working-class circumstances is shattered; he walks home from his first visit to Satis House “deeply revolving that I was a common labouring-boy; that my hands were coarse; that my boots were thick; that I had fallen into a despicable habit of calling knaves Jacks; that I was much more ignorant

than I had considered myself last night, and generally that I was in a low-lived bad way."⁴

From any rational viewpoint, however, the world of wealth and respectability as symbolized by Satis House and its occupants is grotesquely hideous, and were Pip remotely objective he would reject it out of hand and turn happily to a life of rewarding toil at Joe Gargery's forge. But he is not remotely objective; the ministrations of Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook have warped his values and rendered him peculiarly susceptible to the reaction which sets in after this initial exposure to the ways of his "betters." As he writes of the day he is apprenticed to Joe, the great occasion he had hitherto anticipated with such happiness, "I was truly wretched, and had a strong conviction on me that I should never like Joe's trade. I had liked it once, but once was not now" (Chap. XIII, p. 106). To the astute Biddy (in all respects an overwhelmingly positive foil to Estella), he confides his misery, his obsessive ambition to become a gentleman, to gain access to Satis House, to marry the sadistic and dehumanized Estella. Biddy, whose worth Pip simply cannot recognize, points out that his motivations in seeking to win Estella are all wrong and states bluntly and prophetically that for him to be a gentleman simply would not answer: "You know best, Pip," she remarks with full awareness that precisely the opposite is the case, "but don't you think you are happier as you are?" (Chap. XVII, p. 128).

And of course Biddy is right. Once Pip miraculously achieves his great expectations, he undergoes an immediate loss of innocence. The hitherto sympathetic and suffering orphan boy becomes an instant snob and ingrate, acquiring, in fact, many of the ugly qualities exhibited by that other wealthy young buck, Georgie Osborne in *Vanity Fair*. Pip's worst sin by far is ingratitude and disloyalty, for he turns his back upon the one friend and protector of his youth, Joe Gargery, and in so doing demonstrates that he has come to place a social and monetary rather than emotional valuation on human relationships. Thus, on learning of Joe's impending visit to London, Pip concedes his dread at the prospect of being seen, by his snobbish new acquaintances, in the company of the blacksmith, and confesses that "if I could have kept him away by paying money, I certainly would have paid money" (Chap. XXVII, p. 220). Later he attempts to atone for a broken commitment to visit Joe at the forge by sending the blacksmith the paltry gift of a codfish and a barrel of oysters, a gesture which is a mere sop to Pip's uneasy conscience.

⁴ Great Expectations, Rinehart ed. (New York: Holt Rinehart, 1960), Chap. VIII, pp. 64-65. Subsequent references appear in the text.

Ironically, Pip, like Becky, is unhappy in the respectable role he has coveted. He feels compelled to associate with individuals he dislikes, compelled to join a club and participate in activities he finds frivolous and boring, compelled, for appearance's sake, to keep a servant, "the Avenger," whose presence he can barely tolerate. His senseless extravagance occasions constant worry over spiraling debts. And above all, his treatment of Joe is the source of a perpetually rankling conscience. Indeed, once he is established in his genteel position, Pip admits that he was never able to sleep the sound old sleep that was once his at the forge (Chap. XVIII, p. 147).

So Dickens, like Thackeray, clearly suggests that wealth and standing are not necessarily worth the having and are too likely to be won only at great cost to the individual's character. In that connection, it is worth noting that Pip's moral re-awakening, the beginning of his swing back to fundamental decency, coincides with the collapse of his great expectations when Magwitch finally appears and discloses the criminal origins of Pip's wealth.

I think it significant, then, that while Dickens, Thackeray and many other nineteenth-century novelists provide us with initially attractive underdog heroes whose careers roughly parallel those of their eighteenth-century precursors, they also sharply question the worth of what the heroes have achieved—worth which was generally taken for granted by eighteenth-century novelists. And there is, in nineteenth-century fiction, a pointed implication that the price of winning an elevated station in society is loss of innocence and deterioration of character. This notion is borne out not only by the careers of the protagonists themselves; it is also reinforced by the savage portraits we are given of the titled, moneyed and privileged—the older Crawleys, Lord Steyne and old Osborne in *Vanity Fair*, for example, or Bentley Drummle and Miss Hayisham in *Great Expectations*.

More important, both Dickens and Thackeray, provide us with secondary characters who function as moral norms and who, I believe, prefigure the contemporary protagonist in his posture as a loser. Dobbin in *Vanity Fair* is such a character. He is sneered at for his grocer's-boy origins, his equine social clumsiness, his credulousness, generosity and naive loyalty, all of which qualities unfit him for successful competition in the world of the novel. Yet Dobbin is, perhaps, the only entirely admirable and morally healthy character in *Vanity Fair*.

And Dickens gives us two similar losers in the persons of Joe Gargery and Herbert Pocket. The blacksmith is ludicrously shy and inarticulate, self-effacing, gentle, generous, and wholly

without ambition, entirely content with his station and occupation. He is despised by his self-seeking wife, by the despicably time-serving Pumblechook, by Estella and Miss Havisham, and he is eventually disparaged by Pip himself, who, from the perspective of his elevated station can see only Joe's social gaucherie, which, in fact, is nothing less than an emblem of Joe's goodness. And when Pip takes up lodgings with Herbert Pocket in London and hears Herbert discoursing with vague optimism upon the fortunes to be made in insuring ships, Pip worries enviously that Herbert's expectations may exceed his own. He immediately qualifies this disquieting supposition, however: "But, again, there came upon me, for my relief, that odd impression that Herbert Pocket would never be very successful or rich." (Chap. XXII, p. 184). Pip is correct, but in the context of the novel he is unconsciously providing a testimonial to Herbert's unworldly innocence and goodness, for Herbert is really just a more polished, middle-class version of Joe—hard-working, self-sacrificing, open-handed, and willing, unlike Pip, to marry far beneath his modest station.

It is characters like Dobbin, Joe and Herbert, scorned by the more ambitious, worldly and successful figures in these novels, who are the true repositories of human value and the true representatives of human decency. It seems no coincidence that they are also the only characters who achieve genuine happiness, despite their want of the wealth and status so feverishly sought by the Pips and the Beckys.

It was left, perhaps, to Samuel Butler in *The Way of All Flesh* to provide the definitively scathing comment on the nineteenth century's misguided veneration of wealth and respectability. In his portraits of George, Theobald and Christina Pontifex, Butler gleefully lays bare the sanctimonious hypocrisy and smug pietism upon which the whole edifice of Victorian social values was erected. And in Ernest Pontifex, the son of Theobald and Christina, Butler gives us a hero who, in the end, consciously decides to reject everything he has been taught to revere. He spurns the sanctity of the Victorian family, leaving the rearing of his children to the Rollingses, an exuberantly disreputable but loving clan of Thames barge-people. He spurns professional success as an author—that his iconoclastic writings earn little attention and less acclaim troubles him not at all. He inherits modest wealth, and while exhibiting a healthy appreciation of the independence it affords him, neither worships it as an end in itself nor seeks to increase it. And to considerations of reputation and respectability he is totally indifferent—people may think of him what they will. Quite open-eyed, then, Ernest turns

his back on his society and its values in order to live, as one commentator suggests, "a life of modest effort and intelligent selfishness,"⁵ an independent posture which bespeaks both sanity and morality.

I would suggest that Mark Twain, in *Huckleberry Finn*, provides a similarly scathing indictment of nineteenth-century American society, and in Huck himself creates a character who, like Ernest, has tried to adjust to the values of his civilization, has tried to do what he has been taught is right but in his heart knows to be wrong, and who at last also, quite sanely, decides to go his own way: "I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilize [sic] me and I can't stand it. I been there before."⁶

Now it seems to me that Ernest's and Huck's conscious decision to reject society's values and accept the mixed blessings of alienation is a decision duplicated by a great many protagonists of twentieth-century novels, and one usually motivated by essentially identical considerations. Certainly the stance of rebellion and renunciation is very common in the twentieth-century hero, but, once again, there have been significant modifications in this stance since 1945, and these are best illustrated through a comparison of several rebelling and renouncing heroes who made their appearance before World War II with their anti-heroic post-war descendants.

HEMINGWAY'S Frederick Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*, Mann's Hans Castorp in *The Magic Mountain*, James' Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors* and Joyce's Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* may serve as representative pre-war protagonists. Like most earlier twentieth-century-heroes, each is equipped with personal attractiveness, intelligence, courage, adaptability and similarly positive traits. In short, the four share the traditional heroic virtues and each presumably could, if he *chose* to play the game, emerge a winner and achieve the sort of social and material benefits bestowed on so many earlier heroes. But each of these protagonists, like Huck Finn and Ernest Pontifex before them, deliberately chooses *not* to play the game and willingly accepts the risks and sacrifices entailed in that decision.

⁵ Morton Dauwen Zabel, intro. to *The Way of All Flesh*, Modern Library ed. (New York: Random, 1950), p. xxv.

⁶ *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ed. Sculley Bradley (New York: Norton, 1961), p. 226.

In deserting the ambulance corps for the sake of Catherine Barkley and his own conscience, Frederick Henry accepts the dishonor associated with presumptive cowardice and the possibility of death by firing squad. Hans Castorp throws away the prosperous and respectable *bürgerlich* career which has been prepared for him below in order to indulge, for seven years, in a hazardous exercise in intellectual exploration and self-discovery on the Magic Mountain. In following the dictates of his own conscience and his re-awakened sense of life rather than those of diplomacy and personal advantage, Lambert Strether, just as Maria Gostrey says, gives up "everything," sacrificing both his secure position in the Woollett establishment and his once sure prospect of materially and socially advantageous marriage to Mrs. Newsome. And in refusing to be a patriot artist in the Irish tradition, Stephen Dedalus opts for a far more uncertain, difficult and perilous course: "I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use, silence, exile and cunning."⁷

The point I wish to repeat is that those protagonists, like most pre-1945 protagonists, are still *potential* winners. They *could* achieve worldly success, but they deliberately refuse to play the game in order to follow instead some higher call or inner need beyond the understanding of those equipped with more conventional worldly orientations. And we measure the heroism of Henry, Castorp, Strether and Dedalus fairly traditionally, in terms, that is, of the integrity of their vision and of the risks and sacrifices they are willing to accept in order to live by it. Thus their acts of rebellion and renunciation are acts of courage consistent with generally received standards of valor.

BUT WHAT HAS happened since World War II? The hero, in many cases, is no longer even potentially a winner of earthly rewards. He has literally become a born loser. He is typically endowed with some crippling moral, physical or psychological defect which at least partly unfits him for temporal success and debars him from membership in the establishment. I am suggesting, therefore, that authors since World War II have simply gone one step further—and perhaps not a very large step at that—than their twentieth-century predecessors in giving

⁷ *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, (New York: Viking, 1964), Chap V, pp. 246-47.

us protagonists whose very natures and personalities help to *make* them outsiders, not by choice so much as by necessity. And in one sense these protagonists are anti-heroic because, unlike their immediate antecedents, they are seldom given the option of displaying traditional valor by choosing the difficult rather than the easy course, the way of alienation rather than that of accommodation. Alienation is instead an inevitable condition of their essential being, and they are likely to develop a non-temporal orientation and a set of higher values not by conscious design but by the cancellation of all other choices. Even if they were to seek wealth and respectability, their inherent incapacities would disqualify them from attaining or maintaining these goals.

The disability of the contemporary protagonist assumes many forms, and is often both explicit cause and implicit symbol of his alienation. Sometimes the anti-hero is physically grotesque. Gunter Grass' Oskar Matzerath, for example, has a voice which shatters glass. His youth is a solitary one, owing to his maddening and manic compulsion to beat tin drums into scrap metal. For years, and by choice, he refuses to exceed the physical stature he attained at the age of three. When he does decide to grow he undergoes an involuntary metamorphosis from a midget into a hunchback who, in accepting the punishment for a murder he did not commit, figuratively assumes the burden of Nazi guilt and seemingly becomes a Christ figure.

Samuel Beckett's fictional protagonists—Malone, Molloy, the Unnamable—are in most respects quintessentially representative of the anti-heroic type and are invariably enfeebled and physically repulsive, afflicted with the more revolting ills the flesh is heir to. Furthermore, in what is perhaps the most straightforward expression of the contemporary protagonist's alienation and temporal failure, they are usually homeless bums and tramps, brutalized victims of a society to which they cannot belong and a world they never made, forced to undertake an introspective quest for some vestige of meaning and value in their lives.

Frequently the contemporary protagonist exhibits a debilitating emotional or psychological infirmity. Albert Camus' Meursault, for instance, is the victim of a profound emotional anaesthesia. When convicted of shooting the Arab, a pointless crime whose motive he cannot understand let alone explain, he concludes correctly that he is going to be executed not for homicide, but rather for failing to weep at his mother's funeral—for his inability, exploited by the prosecutor, to display the emotional proprieties which society demands of its members.

Meursault's problem is in some respects duplicated in the

case of Jake Horner, the protagonist of John Barth's "*The End of the Road*. Horner experiences periods of emotional hebetude when he is, as he puts it, "weatherless." These lead ultimately to a literal paralysis, the outcome of his inability to desire anything strongly enough to move to achieve it: "I simply ran out of motives, as a car runs out of gas," he explains. "There was no reason to do anything."⁸ Horner's paralysis is cured when he is taught, by a doctor who puts Sartrean existentialism to cynically pragmatic use, to make a conscious stratagem of his apathy by acting out the roles and responses expected by society even while recognizing that he is merely *acting*, quite arbitrarily and with total absence of sincerity or emotional commitment. This tactic (the doctor calls it "mythotherapy") works, but in employing it and thus doing precisely what Meursault was incapable of doing, Horner becomes a moral monster who is restored to humanity only when his emotions are involuntarily involved in a tragi-comic domestic situation which his cynical role-playing has helped to create.

Sometimes, indeed, the weakness of the anti-hero is registered in his lack of sufficient cynicism to simulate convincingly, to mount an insincere but plausible display of the expected forms and rituals which help to win accommodation for the outsider. In *Jill*, Philip Larkin's John Kemp begins with the social promise typical of many eighteenth-century underdog heroes. A Lancashire working boy invited to Oxford on scholarship, he is seemingly in a position, like so many earlier protagonists, to advance to a position commensurate with his merit. But at Oxford he proves self-conscious and unsure of himself among the privileged. In the company of his roommate's sophisticated acquaintances, he becomes so painfully aware of his want of form and polish that he retreats progressively into an escapist world of pure fantasy—the only word in which he can survive socially.

Similarly but less seriously, until the miraculously happy ending, Kingsley Amis' Lucky Jim Dixon is dogged by such a blighting combination of personal bad luck and social gaucherie that the entry he half-heartedly seeks into the provincial university establishment grows an ever more remote prospect; if nothing else, the colossal ineptitude of Dixon's attempts to feign genteel decorum, commitment to the academic life and respect for his superiors qualifies him as one of the drollest protagonists in recent fiction.

The plight of Jim Dixon, that of a man whose worldly

8 *The End of the Road*, Bantam ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1969), Chap. 6, p. 74.

ambitions ironically find expression in actions which are sure to lead to failure, is shared by a number of contemporary protagonists whose blunders, unlike Dixon's, produce grave, sometimes tragic results. In such instances, the protagonists' lapses of judgment and catastrophic miscalculations of consequences are often represented as subconscious manifestations of their unworldly innocence and unconscious rejections of precisely the temporal goals they consciously covet.

Thus, in *The Assistant*, Bernard Malamud's Frank Alpine, the perpetually down-on-his-luck drifter with very American dreams of getting on in the world, discourses with some bewilderment on the elusiveness of success: "Don't ask me why, but sooner or later everything I think is worth having gets away from me in some way or other. I work like a mule for what I want, and just when it looks like I am going to get it I make some kind of a stupid move, and everything that is just about nailed down tight blows up in my face."⁹ Initially as fumbling in his criminal attempts to achieve easy prosperity as in his efforts to atone for them, Alpine is indeed dogged by "stupid moves" until he eventually confesses his guilt and adopts a course of total abnegation and sacrifice for the sake of those he has wronged. In so doing he wins through to his true identity, whose nature is clarified by an elaborate symbolic parallel between Alpine's life and that of St. Francis of Assisi.

Like Alpine, Saul Bellow's Tommy Wilhelm seems nothing less than subconsciously fated to make decisions sure to demolish the very ambitions he seeks to realize, as is indicated by a capsule summary of the major turning points in his life: "And then, when he was best aware of the risks and knew a hundred reasons against going [to Hollywood to become a star] and had made himself sick with fear, he left home. This was typical of Wilhelm. After much thought and hesitation and debate he invariably took the course he had rejected innumerable times. Ten such decisions made up the history of his life. He had decided that it would be a bad mistake to go to Hollywood, and then he went. He had made up his mind not to marry his wife, but ran off and got married. He had resolved not to invest money with Tamkin, and then had given him a check," and he is recognized by others as "a man who reflected long and then made the decision he had rejected twenty separate times."¹⁰ Typically, Wilhelm is able to "seize the day" of the title only by systematically exploding every possibility it offers of alleviating his worldly

⁹ *The Assistant*, Signet ed. (New York: New American, 1962), pp. 31-32.

¹⁰ *Seize the Day*, Viking Compass ed. (New York: Viking, 1961) pp. 23, 60. Subsequent references appear in the text.

distresses. In the end, totally alone, betrayed by friends and relatives alike and weeping at the bier of a complete stranger, he seemingly repudiates the false marketplace values at the root of his problems and recognizes that the way to "the consummation of his heart's ultimate need" (p. 118) is not the way of worldly success he has been so painfully pursuing.

Bellow's Moses Herzog exhibits a more complex manifestation of the same failure syndrome. He too makes his share of "stupid moves" and wrong decisions, but these are the result of his inability to apply common sense rather than ponderous abstract lucubration to solution of even the most rudimentary problems which confront him. Obsessed with his own troubles and those of the modern world, he ultimately falls into a debilitating hyper-intellectuality which finds an outlet in his writing of scores of unsent letters to friends, relations, ex-wives and public figures, and which totally unfits him to deal with the burgeoning chaos of his own affairs. Conceding his unintentional thwarting of his own promise, his tragic but ludicrous inversion of the traditional hero's progress, he admits that he "rose from humble origins to complete disaster."¹¹

Frequently the contemporary protagonist seems automatically entitled, by reason of birth, background and education, to occupy a privileged station in the social hierarchy but discovers that he cannot accept the values of the class to which he naturally belongs. The common result is a repudiation of birthright manifested in socially repellant behavior deliberately or unconsciously calculated to excite loathing in the respectable. Peyton Loftis, the heroine of William Styron's *Lie Down in Darkness*, is a case in point. The beautiful, college-educated daughter of reputable but neurotic Virginian parents, she appears destined to take her place in the contemporary Tidewater aristocracy until a growing awareness of the domestic horror underlying her parents' outwardly genteel lives coupled with a hopeless yearning for the lost innocence of a South she associates with her dead grandmother prompts progressively more flagrant acts of rebellion. To the outrage of her mother, she rejects an opportunity to wed a socially irreproachable young Virginian somehow connected with the Byrd family and marries instead a left-wing Jewish painter from New York City who is a surrogate father. But Harry cannot fulfill the dual role of husband and father, lover and protector, and Peyton falls into a despairing pattern of alcoholism and nymphomania which ends in her suicide.

The career of Geoffrey Firmin, the alcoholic British consul

11 Herzog, Fawcett Crest ed. (New York: Fawcett, 1965), p. 188.

in Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* at one time held as much promise as Peyton's, yet he too dies in equally sordid circumstances. On the very day the longed-for reunion with his estranged wife has taken place, he is shot down, drunk, outside the squalid Mexican bar and brothel he has just patronized, and his body is thrown, like so much refuse, into an adjacent ravine. Though Lowry provides no detailed etiology of the Consul's dipsomania, one can infer that it is partly an outgrowth of his lacerating sense of the hypocrisy of the establishment whose interests he represents (in World War I he had been both court-martialed *and* decorated for a naval action in the course of which a war crime was committed), partly an outgrowth of his consciousness of betrayal at the hands of those he loves (his wife has committed adultery with both his friend of longest standing and his younger brother) and partly a means of recoil from the modern world on the brink of World War II (the Spanish Civil War is being waged when the action of the novel takes place). And though Firmin's drunkenness excites predictable outrage and contempt among his associates, the reader is meant to see that it is, in some ways, a heroic response and that the Consul is not without his own peculiar greatness.

Humbert Humbert, the equally gifted protagonist of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* exhibits, in his compulsive pedophilia, an infirmity even more anathematized by society than alcoholism, and yet, here too, the reader is made to see that the protagonist's outwardly repulsive behavior is in part idealistically motivated. Humbert's obsessive sexual questing after nymphets is at bottom a quest for innocence lost in a world of unfeeling adults and a pathetic attempt to capture the bliss he associates with his first childhood love. Moreover, it is clear that he is more seduced than seducing, more exploited than exploiting in his relations with Lolita, that his treatment of her is demonstrably less monstrous than that of her outwardly irreproachable mother, and that his values and "civilization" are far superior to those of the respectable middle-class Americans who loathe and condemn him. John Fowles' Ferdinand Clegg in *The Collector* and Keith Waterhouse's Jubb in the novel of that title are also furnished with repellant sexual aberrations, yet they too, like Humbert, are meant in the end to engage the reader's sympathy and qualified approbation.

Sometimes the anti-hero is provided with a vision, with the apprehension of a fundamental truth about himself or his world which compels him to a course of action bound to affront or outrage society. Flannery O'Connor's religious fanatics, like Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood* or old Mason Tarwater and young

Tarwater (who simultaneously drowns and baptizes his retarded cousin in taking the first step of his prophetic mission in *The Violent Bear It Away*) are such characters. Each develops a sense of evangelical ordination which he acts out with blind, obsessive steadfastness, only to be ridiculed and punished by an unheeding world. Yet, in spite of the violence and criminality with which these heroes typically try to enforce their causes, O'Connor makes it clear that they are in possession of fundamental verities beyond the grasp of the sane and well-adjusted members of society who cast them out.

Joseph Heller's Yossarian arrives at a similarly transforming, albeit secular truth in *Catch-22*. After flying as a bombardier on more than his share of combat missions, after recognizing the uniform corruption of the military establishment and the mockery it makes of the ideals it is allegedly fighting to protect, Yossarian comes to see that nothing represented by that establishment is worth dying for. That conviction compels him to outrage and astound his superiors and peers by casting aside his uniform in favor of nakedness, to "make an uncouth spectacle of himself."¹² in enforcing his refusal to fly more missions by walking around backwards with a loaded .45, and ultimately to reject his superiors' face-saving offer to send him home as a hero in favor of desertion. The contrast between Yossarian's behavior and the response of that earlier deserter, Frederick Henry, to relatively similar circumstances nicely indicates the bizarre extremity with which the anti-hero's alienation and revolt is typically expressed.

But in this case too the distinction between the alienation of the contemporary protagonist and that of his immediate literary predecessors is one of degree rather than kind. "Whereas most of the latter protagonists chose alienation and embarked on their extra-social courses in a relatively unspectacular and often quietly heroic manner, the anti-hero is apt to have his alienation at least partly thrust upon him as a necessary condition of his character, and to exhibit that condition very spectacularly and unheroically indeed. And it is the task of the contemporary novelist to convince us that the disabilities of his protagonist, those seeming defects of character, personality, psychology or ethics which contribute to his outcast role, are in fact virtues or at least manifestations of inner innocence and decency, whereas the "normality" of those well-adjusted members of society who anathematize him is, by human and humanitarian standards, often abnormal and vicious.

12 *Catch-22*, Dell ed. (New York, Dell, 1962) Chap. 39, p. 413.

In this connection, it is surely no coincidence that the most villainous characters in the contemporary novels I have touched upon are often those with the most smoothly winning ways, those who have achieved a significant measure of wealth, status and respectability, those, in short, who are born winners, manifestly successful in all temporal respects. One thinks, in this connection, of Bertrand Welch in *Lucky Jim*, the Karpis and the Pearls in *The Assistant*, Dr. Adler and Mr. Rappaport in *Seize the Day*, Valentine Gersbach in *Herzog*, Clare Quilty in *Lolita*, and, most emphatically, of Milo Minderbinder in *Catch-22*.

WHAT WE have then, in the presentation of the anti-hero and his socially successful opposite numbers, is an infinitely more strident questioning of the value of temporal success and the human qualities which contribute to it than has hitherto appeared. The theme itself is not new; it began to emerge in the nineteenth century, has been stated with progressively growing conviction since, and finds the most forcible expression in the anti-heroes of contemporary fiction.

To be sure, there are many exceptions to the general pattern of fictional development which I suggest has resulted in today's anti-heroes. Not all eighteenth-century protagonists progressed from rags to riches. Not all nineteenth-century protagonists did so only to discover that they preferred the rags, and that worldly ascendancy was apt to be won only at too great a cost in innocence and other intangible values. Not all earlier twentieth-century protagonists acted on this awareness by consciously rejecting affluence and respectability in favor of alienation growing out of a dedicated pursuit of their individual goals and values rather than those endorsed by society. And not all contemporary protagonists exhibit an often enforced alienation so flagrant and intense in its manifestations as to earn them the cognomen of anti-heroes. But these patterns do obtain in a very significant number of novels belonging to the four separate periods in question, and these progressive stages in the development of the fictional protagonist seem clear enough to justify my belief that the anti-hero is the genetically predictable outgrowth of a discernible evolutionary process in fiction rather than a sudden and unpredictable contemporary mutation.

Thus the contemporary anti-hero as loser has evolved into the diametric opposite of his winning eighteenth-century ancestors, and his inherent incapacity generally accounts in large measure for his being perforce cast in the role of loser and outsider. But his social disabilities are generally compensated for by more

than just the considerable gifts of objective insight about himself and his society which he necessarily develops precisely because he *is* an outsider. I would agree with Ihab Hassan's cautious but provocative evaluation of the contemporary hero and his unique flaws and virtues:

Precisely what the new hero stands for, no one can yet define. He is not exactly the liberal's idea of the victim, not the conservative's idea of the pariah, not the radical's idea of the rebel. Or perhaps he is all of these and none in particular. Sometimes one aspect of his makeup is underscored, sometimes another. His capacity for pain seems very nearly saintly, and his passion for heresy almost criminal. But flawed in his sainthood and grotesque in his criminality, he finally appears as an expression of man's quenchless desire to affirm, despite the voids and vicissitudes of our age, the human sense of *life*!¹³

I suggest that it is nothing less than the contemporary hero's disability, the very weakness compelling him to play the loser's role, which is both the cause and the symbol of what Hassan has called his "radical innocence." And I suggest again that it is this hero's capacity to affirm life, even as a loser, which makes him heroic and which ultimately makes him, paradoxically enough, a winner.

¹³ **Radical Innocence: The Contemporary American Novel**, Harper Colophon ed. (New York: Harper, 1966), p. 6.

Countryman

HENRY A. FOLEY

It is not strange
That a countryman puts down his feet
In careful pauses
Or that his tongue
Whittles long upon his thoughts
Before he speaks.

You have to know
That stones break plows
And too green things
Can have a killing edge.

The Body in the Square

DENNIS M. WELCH

say, what's this?
I touched
it.
it was once a bright blue vanilla
lass, graze-point Stroebel.
what happened?
hung upsidedown in the center of the
town
raped?
no, just burned to
death.
she did what?
tended geese, sang dull songs, slept under
dead moons.
what else?
that's it. only she didn't sleep with the
generals.
look, those black castanet heels;
burst eyeballs
moaning.
she told the soldiers, "hell, hurl your
bayonets into the sea
so swordfish can be made of sharks,
and men of lead and history and
mutton."
enemy propaganda.
of course.
we walked over and sat on a bench. the
trucks climbed over the hill and came down to
us, truck after truck after truck, their
tires shuffling the fat yellow
dust. inside rode wounded half-men
and as they passed the mimicry of bone and
woman, one of them said, "she might have
loved us if we had been real
enough." "sure," the others said,
"sure."

A Notion to Rain

CHARLES OLIVER

THAT YEAR, for the first time in Art Wheeler's life, the summer stretched out before him not as a long festival away from the humdrum slow march of school but as a desert, vast hot empty spaces to cross, like Death Valley, to reach September. Baseball, that which had organized and filled a good part of every summer since he was six, was behind him now. There was a girl in the park with short black hair and brown legs. At sixteen she was only a year older than he, but he did not have enough money to support his growing cigarette habit.

One evening in early June he was sprawled in the porch swing, a leg draped over the back, eyes distant and abstract. He had been recalling a daydream of a year ago when the family was preparing to move from Arkansas to Tulsa, and he had dreamed that within twelve months he would grow six inches and discover oil in the backyard. Now he was two inches taller and poor as ever, as the only oil in the rear of the small frame house was drippings from his father's Chevrolet. When his father arrived home from work at Douglas Aircraft that evening, he was still lying in the swing, thinking now about the good places in America, those free places where the heart's desire could be realized. He was entertaining vague ideas about setting out on a search when his father, in gray work clothes, carrying a dull black lunch pail, crossed the porch. A discontent, edged with fear, rose in him. His father, too, worried about money, constantly, years and years, perhaps every day of his adult life, and now he was forty-five, still in debt, still worrying.

"I need two bits," Art said.

His father paused at the door. "What for, son?"

Art raised a foot and seemed to study his shoe. "I better say I just need it."

"Cigarettes, huh?" his father said. "I told you a month

ago, Art, that if you choose to be stupid, you're going to pay for your own smokes."

He squeezed his eyes closed and wiped his palms on his blue jeans, thinking he would dramatize for his father how sharp the pain was. When he opened his eyes, his father was gone. He stood up and walked the length of the porch, which was almost the width of the house, then walked back. "Well, dammit, Daddy," he said aloud, possessed with the memory of the heady vapors of a Pall Mall. He went up the street toward the park, keeping a discreet eye out for a butt. "I wish there was a job to get," he said.

II

THREE DAYS later in the *Tulsa World* he found a classified advertisement for a chauffeur. He hurried to the telephone, repeating the number to himself. With a nervous finger he dialed the number. "Cheetham Enterprises," said a man with a sing-song voice.

"I was calling about the job in the paper," Art began.

"Are you certain you are qualified? Are you eighteen?"

It was a necessary lie he told, but those which followed were for decoration. Yes, he said, he had some brief experience as a chauffeur for an Arkansas banker before he moved to Tulsa this summer. He had graduated from high school and now had to work a couple of years, *at least*, to save back money for college. When the man inquired whether he lived with his parents, Art experienced a desperate moment. "No... Well, you see, they died, I'm afraid."

"I'm awfully sorry."

"I'm an orphan," Art said.

As the questioning continued Art became aware he was making a favorable impression. His confidence was soaring when his mother, dustrag in hand, came through the hallway. Art was shocked, and a chill fluttered down his spine. "A last question," the man was saying, "Have you objections to working with the handicapped?"

Oh, lord, Art thought. "Not at all," he said. "I admire them." He saw himself pushing a wheelchair.

The man arranged an interview that afternoon at the residence of Mr. Edgar "Red" Cheetham. The address was on Reservoir Hill, north of downtown Tulsa, a good four miles from his house. The day was hot and blue-skyed, and soon he was sweating. There were crescent stains beneath the armpits

of his hound's-tooth shirt, beads on his forehead, then a sweat-drop trickled down his stomach and caused him to shudder.

As he approached Pine Street he spotted a long cigarette butt. Kneeling, he pretended to tie his shoe laces and claimed it, but as he rose to his feet he saw an old Negro on the porch of a small house grinning at him. He had to resist an impulse to curse the old man and then to fling the butt away. But he hurried on, and when he was out of sight he lit up.

The house was two-storied, white painted brick with black shutters, skirted with decorative shrubs and flowerbeds. Red roses bloomed by the door. The great emerald lawn was being watered with sprinklers. A man in a blue serge suit answered the door, smiling enormously beneath horn-rimmed glasses, shooting out a hand. Art, remembering to stare into the man's eyes, gripped as hard as he could without distorting his face. Art treaded as lightly as possible on the beige carpet, fearful he would leave a track of dirt, as he followed the man into a large richly appointed room. It was crowded with furniture—two sofas, four or five padded chairs, two leather-covered recliners, a desk in a corner, a huge console television and radio and phonograph—with pictures of landscapes and *The Last Supper* and plaques and shelves of knickknacks, a built-in bookcase with neat matched sets of encyclopedias and *Great Books*.

The man indicated he should take a seat and Art obeyed. On the marble-topped coffee table was a silver service. "A demitasse of coffee for you?" the man asked, already reaching for dainty cup and saucer which looked like toys to Art. Wanting to take no chance of offending, Art said he very much would.

The blue-suited man with the sing-song voice was the office manager for Cheetham Enterprises, a thriving company which manufactured novelty items—keyrings of twenty-five varieties, calendars, tokens, dingbats, gadgets, doomawatchies, thingamijigs, doodads. The man pointed out examples on the wall shelves. And Red Cheetham, he said, had single-handedly created this empire. He had started by selling brooms and brushes door-to-door after World War II. He had prospered in small ways, until he could salt away bits of capital. Then in 1950 he had risked everything on his novelty firm, and now he was a well-to-do man, obviously. This past year the company had sales of almost a half million, and the future stretched dizzily upward.

"Which brings us to you," the man said. "Last week Mr. Cheetham purchased a new Cadillac limousine, a beautiful piece of machinery, as you shall discover for yourself. And now he has decided to employ a chauffeur—and handyman around the

house. Tell me, before I bring the Cheethams down to meet you, would you accept a rather modest starting salary?"

"I figure I would," Art said. "I need the money."

"Excellent. Seventy-five cents an hour. Not the highest wages in this year of our Lord, granted, but for your experience and education it's not bad. And if you perform your duties well . . . He poured Art another dab of coffee, then excused himself to go upstairs.

Alone, Art brooded upon the seventy-five cents an hour, a small disappointment. It was acceptable, as he had never earned that much before, had never worked except as a paperboy. Seventy-five cents was seventy-five times better than sitting around a hot house or scouting the park for cigarette butts.

In a few minutes the man in the blue suit entered, a hand on the elbow of both Mr. and Mrs. Cheetham. She was plump and seemed timid, but the man with the sparse red hair, in the expensive gray suit, moved boldly. He was six inches taller than his office manager, and his voice was loud and commanding. As they entered he was saying, "Why, this is the year nineteen hundred and—" He broke off when he accidentally bumped against a chair.

As Art stood and Red Cheetham approached he seemed larger and tougher yet, except perhaps for the belly, which appeared soft and too large. Art noticed that both moved rather slow, carrying their chins high. Thinking that was a mannerism of the rich, he did not completely realize they were both blind until Red Cheetham, extending a hand to shake, punched him in the stomach.

III

THE WIFE Birdie was childish, soft-spoken and dependent on her husband and her maid, a two-hundred pound Negro woman who chain smoked and studied him with amused and knowing eyes, and then on Art. Birdie's voice Art finally identified as Marilyn Monroe's, breathless, full of knowledge and expectation of pain. She called her husband Mr. Cheetham.

But Red Cheetham himself fascinated Art, who thought he stood for power and excellence. He demanded, bellowed, ordered. Always in a hurry, he was constantly bumping into things which he raged at. Cheetham could not tolerate idleness or weakness. From the first day Art was under instructions to stay busy. After he delivered Cheetham to the office he was to find work around the house, except for those infrequent times Mrs.

Cheetham wished to be driven someplace. But staying busy proved to be the most difficult part of the job. In the first three weeks he had washed the Cadillac seven times and mowed the lawn four times. He had trimmed the shrubs, weeded the flower beds, installed a birdhouse, run errands to stores for the maid. Yet he was constantly in danger of having nothing to do. He was smoking a pack a day. Finally one morning he hesitantly inquired of Cheetham if he knew of any special jobs for him that day. "Mow the lawn," Cheetham said.

"I mowed it day before yesterday, Mr. Cheetham," Art said.

"Mow it again! Trim the hedge! Wash the car! Do what Birdie wants! Look around, son, don't you have eyes? It's not difficult to find work in this day and age. If you're not spending you time avoiding it. That's my advice. Don't wait until someone has to tell you."

Art drove straight back to the house and got out the lawn mower. Although the blade was set so low to the ground it all but skinned the lawn, only occasionally did it manage to clip a blade of grass. Art followed the power mower around for half an hour, but then as he paused to survey his work he discovered he could not tell the difference between the mowed and unmowed sections. He grimaced and spit, then shut off the engine and rolled it into the garage. Next he clipped a few leaves off a bush. He walked around the house searching with a hard eye and ready clippers for anything growing out of line. Then he washed the car, but at mid-morning he was finished. He inquired of Mrs. Cheetham whether she desired to go anyplace or needed anything fixed inside the house. No, she said. What should he do? Why not mow the lawn, she said. He stared at her, wondering if she were deaf, too.

He ambled around the house, admiring its massiveness, daydreaming about owning such a house one day himself. He stopped in the backyard and gazed at the Tulsa skyline. Today it floated in a white haze. Art imagined Cheetham downtown, pausing at his office window, and Art abruptly ceased scratching his crotch and lifted a hand to salute him. Then he realized Cheetham would not be able to see him. Suddenly he was agitated, fretful, because he was idle.

Within ten minutes he had found something to do. He was dismantling the carburetor of the Cadillac, studying each part carefully. He worked hard and intently, with extreme caution, and he barely had it reassembled by the time he had to go pick up Cheetham that afternoon. Even then the engine died at every stoplight, and Cheetham cursed the General Motors Corporation

and the Greenlease-Letterman Agency. "I'll fix it tomorrow," Art said.

"You lay one finger on this car and I'll fire your ass," Cheetham bellowed.

Art was working six days a week, and Saturday afternoons he enjoyed the most, because Cheetham was home and Art could watch and listen. Cheetham spent Saturday morning at the office, but then Art would pick him up at noon. Cheetham never failed to chastize himself for going soft and taking a half day off. Next thing you know, he said, I'll be taking up golf. By now Art knew better than to question such a statement. Cheetham would not be crossed. His indomitable pride was that he could do anything, *anything*, he decided to do. Once he claimed he could learn to type with his toes within a week, if necessary, and when Art snickered Cheetham became cold and furious. He had a storehouse of anecdotes which invariably took the form of someone insisting this or that was an impossibility and then his proving otherwise. He always drew the moral that if he could accomplish so much everyone should be as well off. Fascinated, Art thought of his father. It was a problem not to consider him a failure, a lesser man, although he wanted to quarrel with the implications his father was lazy or ignorant.

Art tended to sentimentalize Cheetham and his accomplishments. He was reluctant to admit to himself Cheetham could be a bully to his wife as well as employees, not a week had passed that he had not threatened to fire Art. Once when Birdie had inquired what a noise was, Cheetham exploded. "Don't you know what a goddam jackhammer sounds like! I told you they're repairing the street!" Then quietly to Art he added, "Hell, she's never seen one." He had mentioned previously that while his wife had been blind from birth he had had twenty-twenty vision throughout the Depression, until he served in the Pacific during the war. It had taken the Japanese Empire, Tojo himself, to put out his eyes. He liked to describe in detail to his wife the appearance of things, and although he was sometimes wrong Art learned never to correct him. Once Cheetham had maintained that a woodpecker was blue and red and white. When Art said no, its jacket was black, Cheetham had flung out a hand. "Goddamit, do you think I don't know what a pecker-wood looks like! I grew up with them." He cursed, and for three days afterwards Cheetham was so sullen Art expected to be fired.

If Cheetham sometimes had a tongue like a whip, there were other times when there was a hush in his voice, a sug-

gestion of gentleness. These times Art was rapt with attention. Always these occasions concerned the old days, the boyhood of Red Cheetham, the boyhood home. A yellow evening darkening slowly, the moon rising silvery, birds circling in the quiet air, ripe fields, cowbells in the pasture, now an unexpected hint of autumn in the indrawn breath, the family exchanging sudden looks as they rested after supper on the porch of the house on the rise.

It was a wooden house painted white, and it smelled of ginger and cinnamon. The kitchen itself was bigger, he said, than the living rooms of these tacky modern houses. He remembered his mother cooking at the wood stove, plain food, home grown, squash and green beans and potatoes and onions and turnip greens. Homemade bread, pecan pie. He remembered his mother sitting in a cane-bottom chair, knitting and darning, while she hummed a gospel song. His father was a man who worked from sunup until sundown and knew what was right and wrong.

Twelve children, seven brothers and four sisters, now scattered across the country, Cheetham the oldest and richest, only brother Jake still at home. His mama and daddy were both dead now, buried in a country cemetery . . . only Jake and his brood living at the homestead.

Then while Art moved through that distant land Cheetham's voice would change and he would begin to lecture about thrift and diligence and deferral of pleasure. Once he had shown Art the contents of a strong box in his study. It was filled with stocks and bonds. "Take a guess," Cheetham had said, "how much I'm holding here in my hand."

But Art's mind was full of golden afternoons, the swimming hole, boys stripped of their tattered clothes leaping from bent trunks of ancient trees into the blue water. Mumblypeg with jackknives. Wagons of pungent hay, barnlofts of hay, horses sleek and fast. A rider crossing a meadow as evening came down. In the distance voices rising, the song rising, the fiddles sad and lovely in the night, the laughter of girls. "Were you happy?" Art asked. "Were you really happy?"

IV

ONE DAY Cheetham announced that come Saturday they would take an excursion to the old homeplace. That Friday Art washed and polished the Cadillac, and the next morning they headed toward Muskogee. The car, once they had cleared the

city traffic, flowed like a river, heavy and smooth. The chauffeur had the front seat forward as far as possible, but even then he had found it necessary to take, without permission, a blue sofa pillow from the Cheethams' living room. Now he sat on the pillow and steered, comfortable and self-satisfied as a man with a big cigar. He was tempted to speed up.

Cheetham and Birdie rode in the back seat, sipping Dr. Peppers and chatting.

"Poor ole Jake," he said. "Poor ole Jake. He didn't have what it takes. All he's got is a passel of runny-nosed kids." He continued, explaining that the house in which Jake and his wife and four children live actually belonged to him. He rented it to his brother cheaply. Still, Jake owed him two thousand dollars, plus interest.

Art was gradually increasing the speed until by the time they reached the outskirts of a tiny Negro hamlet he was doing seventy. The car whipped past the state reformatory for Negro girls.

Soon they were bypassing Muskogee and heading for Warner. Following Cheetham's directions, Art slowed and kept an eye out for a roadside grocery and filling station. There Cheetham purchased gas and an assortment of penny candy.

They turned down a gravel road then and followed it for miles. It grew narrow and rough. Art slowed and eased the precious car along. Rocks whammed against the underside. Cheetham bellowed. The road forked, and now the car was barely moving, jerking and swaying as it crossed chugholes and rocks. A tree limb swung a fan across the windshield.

"What's that!" Cheetham shouted. "Are you driving in the ditch?"

"I'm on the road."

"Well, dammit, I suppose I'm going to have to come up there and drive."

Art held his tongue.

Then they topped a rise and entered a clearing. On the right rose the embankment of a stock pond. In the field an old hayrake rusted. A white-faced cow turned her head to show them enormous eyes, and a dog began to bark.

Cheetham was pointing to the left. "Over here is the pond. The best fishing in the world. There's more fish in that little hole than in the Atlantic. God, when I was a boy . . . If I'd had sense I could have made a fortune. Supplied fish to everybody in the county—Tulsa, too!" He slapped his knee, happy with his own wit. Art now was pulling up to the house. A pack of dogs were circling the car, barking. Cheetham was leaning over

the seat, pointing toward the barn, which was about a hundred yards away. "Perfect, isn't it. It may be small, but let me tell you, houses today aren't made half as good. That house is ninety-one years old."

In the yard were several old tires. Another was suspended from a tree limb to make a swing. The house appeared ramshackled to Art, gray weathered with a corrugated tin roof. On the small porch were an old white wringer washer and two large sacks of feed. Now two half-clothed children were watching them emerge from the limousine, then Jake and his wife came out to welcome them, Jake carrying his straw hat, his wife brushing off her dress. Jake was leaner and smaller than his brother. He took Cheetham's proffered hand limply. For a minute there was much talk: how are you, how's it going, good to see you, I declare, we didn't know what to think when we saw that car, we should have known, the children are getting so big, you ought to see Jake Junior, this is my personal chauffeur Art Wheeler, pleased to meet you.

Abruptly the silence fell. They all stood waiting. Jake shifted his weight to his other foot, and his wife glanced back toward the children who were edging toward them. She wiped her hands on her apron. Her husband looked at her, and Art saw a strange message pass.

"Say something, Art," Cheetham said. "Well, what do you think?"

"Fine," Art said.

There was another silence.

"Looks like it might take a notion to rain this afternoon," Jake said.

Cheetham canted his eyes upward, drew a noisy breath. "Don't think so," he said. "Not today."

In the southwest was a large bruise-colored cloud, but above them the sky was clear.

"Y'all come on in," Jake's wife said. "I'll fix you a bite to eat directly."

The procession moved toward the house.

"It shorely do," Jake said. "Looks like we might have a spell of rain."

"Here, kids!" Cheetham shouted. "Guess what I've got if you're good." He held out the bag of candy, and the children looked at each other and tried to resist smiling.

At first Art was uncomfortable, then bored, despite the efforts of Jake and his wife to put him at ease. He drank a glass of strawberry kool-aid, then a cup of coffee, then a gourd dipper full of water. He announced he was going for a walk.

Jake ordered his oldest boy, Jake Junior, to show him around the place.

"Get you a handful of that candy to take with you," Cheetham said.

"No, sir, I don't want none," Jake Junior said, and both his parents glanced at him with traces of alarm.

"Aw, I know better," Cheetham said. "You think a sixteen-year-old boy is too big for candy, don't you? Go ahead and get you some."

But Jake Junior was already leaving the room, and Art followed. Jake Junior wore jeans so old they were almost white, a cotton shirt unbuttoned to expose a broad strip of brown skin, and heavy boots. He was an inch or so taller than Art.

"I'll show you the barn first," he said, walking slightly ahead. Grasshoppers laced the air about their feet. They exchanged no further word until they were standing side by side in the cool rich odors, gazing at the stalls and hayloft. "There it is," Jake Junior said. "Say, how'd you get that job?"

Art explained about the newspaper advertisement. He found it unnecessary to repeat the lies about his age and experience.

"I need me a good job," Jake Junior said. "I need me a car before school starts up."

Art felt a strong bond between them.

"But there's no work around here that pays money. I should of gone to the wheat harvest." He hesitated then, bent over to pick up a straw. "It'd surprise me if you was paid good."

Art stared at his profile. "Why?"

Jake Junior chewed and the straw danced. "You work for Red Cheetham, don't you?" He permitted his head to revolve slowly like a beacon until his eyes shone on Art. "Don't you?" Art met his eyes and remained silent, wondering if he were being tested. Jake Junior turned his head and spit. "Him and his goddam bubblegum! Blow bubbles out your ass! That's what I'd like to say to him. That's what I'd like to say all right," he repeated, as if it were the punch line of a joke. Art, astonished, was uncertain whether he should defend his employer or walk away or inform Jake Junior he would not listen to such comments. So he merely kept quiet.

They walked toward the pond then, but soon Jake Junior, having made connections with a passion, returned to the subject of his uncle. "I bet he sure thinks he's a big shot riding around in that car."

Art did his best to temper the remark. "Well, he's got a right to be proud, doesn't he? We don't have - -"

"Let him be proud! I don't care if he's proud. That's the

truth. What I'm saying is let the bragging sonofabitch stop lord-ing it over us. That's what I'm saying. I'll tell you what. Last year he threatened to throw Mama and Daddy out. Did he brag about that to you?"

"He's just like that. He's always threatening. He really wouldn't."

"He oughten to say he's going to! Mama and Daddy are worried all the time now." Jake Junior swallowed, and Art somehow knew what was going to be uttered. "He's blind, you know."

A silence touched with awe. They looked away from each other. Art picked up a stone and sailed it toward the pond. No more was said about Red Cheetham.

V

WHEN THEY LEFT to return to Tulsa, the rainclouds covered the sky, and before they reached the highway there were gusts of rain. "Poor Mabel," Birdie said. "She seemed so tired and wornout and worried. But who wouldn't be seeing after all those kids."

"All those kids, my eye," Cheetham said. "Jake takes more seeing after. Is that oldest boy as dumb as Jake? Hey, Art!"

"I don't know."

"You have eyes, don't you?"

"Yeah, but it's not written on him. I said I don't know."

"You don't, huh? I thought you were a smart young man. What did Jake Junior tell you?"

He had no time to consider his reply. "Nothing. Except that you were about to throw them out."

"HMMMM." There was a silence which stretched slowly out. "That house and land belong to me."

Art sensed his job was in danger, and somehow that caused him to increase the speed. The speedometer needle climbed past fifty, swung to sixty, past sixty. Driving with one hand, he shook a cigarette from the pack and then punched in the lighter.

"How fast are you going?"

"About fifty."

"It feels faster," Birdie said.

"I'll slow down if it'd make you feel better."

"Goddam sure would. You drive safely," Cheetham said.

He withdrew his foot from the pedal so the car slowed dramatically, then he gradually over miles of wet road worked the speed up again, and by the time they reached the Negro hamlet he was doing seventy-five. The windshield wipers were

flipping wildly now. Far ahead he saw a hitchhiker in the rain. He touched the brakes, thinking hard and fast now, reaching for another cigarette.

"What's the matter?"

"Town." First he realized it was a black man, then that it was not a man at all. He was coasting still. It was a girl, a young Negro girl. Of a sudden he made his decision and hit the brakes and angled off the highway after he passed her. She was fifty yards back by the time he stopped.

"I said what's the matter!" Cheetham bellowed, leaning forward. "What's wrong!"

"I think we may have a flat," Art said, already opening the door. I'll check."

The rain was coming down steadily, and the clouds looked swollen with enough rain to last a long long time. Art trotted toward the girl, grinning to allay the fear registering now on her face. He raised a friendly hand. Glancing over his shoulder to determine if he were out of hearing distance, he saw the face of Red Cheetham staring desperately out the rear window, mouth moving, saying what, yelling what? "You want a lift?" he asked.

Her eyes were huge, chocolate brown. The rain was streaming down her face. "I don't know," she said, taking a step backward. Her clothes were soaked, so Art could see clearly the shape of her thin body. "Where you going?"

"Tulsa. Where you headed?"

She eyed him closely, alert like a deer, suddenly pretty in Art's eyes.

"I'm heading out," she said. "Anyplace."

Quickly he explained to her that it was not his own car he was driving but that since the true owners were blind she was welcome to ride if she would keep quiet. They would never know the difference. She wrinkled her nose and, cocking her head, sighted him as if aiming a gun. A lip lifted, white teeth flashed. "You a crazy man?"

"It'll be all right," he said. "Hurry up if you're coming." He walked away a few steps, motioned for her to follow, then turned his back and strode toward the car. He could hear the rapid footsteps before she was beside him.

"I sure hope you're not crazy," she said.

"Shuuu," he whispered. "We'll be all right."

VI

THE BLACK CAR was rolling down the highway, gathering speed. The rain was pounding on the roof, sloshing beneath the tires. The air was darkening. Cheetham was bellowing. "Turn

off that music! How fast are we going! Slow down! Damn you, is someone in this car!"

Art offered a smile and wink to the girl across from him. She wrinkled her nose and smiled back. "Don't worry about a thing!" he shouted to Cheetham. "This is the year nineteen hundred and fifty-seven!"

He was doing ninety.

Too Much to Ask

BIRON WALKER

You leave distinctive marks throughout the house
when you breeze in: rugs furrow up; walls brace,
then shy away; hangings tilt and quiver;
lacquers chip; crystal and china shiver.

A door slams; a vase or tray crashes to
the floor. I think of dustpans, mend-its, glue.
My mind's eye pictures herds of cattle
snorting, wild-eyed—not just one girl slim and pale.

I strained in fidgets once to hear the traffic
on distant streets or rain-soaked tree limbs break.
Now, from washing in them, I've learned to take
cacophonies serenely in your wake.

It seems a shame the space that you require
in which to swing your elbows, knees, derriere
does not exist, or that it's fixed for all time—
Euclidean, not fitting to your frame.

Yes, you have too much for me to ask you have
it neat, for you as liberally move
in loftier spheres like love, like love, and by
such spendings twice redouble their supply.

Jemmy Stott

JON HASSLER

OUT OF THE orange sun rising at the end of the gravel road came an orange school bus headed for Willowby. It slowed as it approached the Stott driveway. Jemmy stepped out the kitchen door and hung a dish towel on the wire stretched between the house and a jackpine, then, shivering, she went back inside for the denim jacket with the frayed cuffs that hung on the nail by the door. As she walked out to the bus, the driver honked, for he had seventeen miles and twenty-four stops to go, but Jemmy did not hurry.

The honking woke Jemmy's father. He sat up in bed and before he opened his eyes he put a pair of glasses on his creased, ashen face. His bed was in a small, windowless room that might have been a closet. There were empty bedrooms upstairs, but he had sealed off the upstairs because the roof leaked and the windows were broken and bats lived up there year around. As he combed his long, red hair with his fingers, he heard the bus pull away in low gear. He put on his pants and two flannel shirts, old and spotted with paint, and he went barefoot into the front room where his two little ones, Marty and Candy, sat with their jackets on watching television.

"Come on," he croaked, and they pulled themselves away from television, looking back at it as they followed him into the kitchen. He found his slippers under the kitchen table, but the jacket with the frayed cuffs wasn't hanging on the nail by the door.

"Get in the car," he said, and he went back to his bedroom for a sweater.

The boy, Marty, who was ten, ran to the old Dodge parked under the jackpine and jumped into the back seat. Candy, six years old, ran after him but not fast enough; when she reached the car the doors were locked. She hit a frosty window with

her fist and shouted "Damn you," and Marty laughed to hear her say it. He couldn't see out through the frost, but he knew by the slamming of the kitchen door that his father was coming, so he unlocked the doors and let Candy into the back seat.

His father pressed the palms of both hands on the outside of the windshield and melted away two patches of frost big enough to see through. He got in and started the engine and listened to it clatter for a minute before he shifted into gear. Wrenching the steering wheel as far as it would go, he made a tight circle between the tree and the back step and he drove out of the shadow of the house, down the bumpy driveway and onto the gravel road. The two clear patches on the windshield widened as he headed into the sun, and by the time he drove the two miles to Basswood Corner the frost was sliding and dripping away from all the windows.

At Basswood Corner he pulled off the road and let Marty and Candy out in front of the reservation schoolhouse, an unpainted frame building with two outhouses and one teacher and, above the front steps, a belfry without a bell.

This was the first year that Stott delivered his children to school. During the eight years that Jemmy had gone to reservation school, she had walked the two miles to Basswood Corner everyday. And Marty, too, had been accustomed to walking during his first three years of school, but now Marty and Candy rode, because this year Candy was old enough for the first grade and she was Stott's favorite.

With the engine clattering, Stott watched Candy as she joined a group of friends by the swing in the schoolyard, and the sight of her with other girls made him uncomfortable. She wore old dresses of Jemmy's that were found on a closet shelf, third- and fourth-grade dresses that covered Candy's ankles. Nobody else in the schoolyard looked so frumpy.

Stott made a U-turn and stopped in front of the only other building on Basswood Corner, a store called Rock's Place, which contained groceries and hardware and a bar at the back for drinking beer. He bought a package of cigarettes and a slab of smoked fish from Stan Rock, a scar-faced Indian, who with a wife and five children lived in a dented house trailer behind the store.

Stott returned home, and as he entered the kitchen he heard a television voice speaking to the empty front room. He dropped the slab of fish on the kitchen table and his sweater on the floor and he went to his bedroom for the bottle he kept under his bed.

After a breakfast of schnapps and fish, he cleared a tangle

of blankets off the couch in the front room (Marty's blankets, for the couch was Marty's bed) and he lay down to watch the fuzzy picture on television. By noon his bottle of schnapps was empty and he went to bed. He overslept, and Marty and Candy—she for the first time in her six weeks as a first grader—walked home from school.

The orange bus brought Jemmy home from Willowby at suppertime. The sun was low, and as she walked to the house a cold wind clutched at her open jacket and her long, black hair, but she did not hurry. From the woodpile behind the house, she carried into the kitchen a few sticks of aspen and started a fire in the range. She picked her father's sweater off the floor and hung it, with her jacket, on the nail by the door. Later, when she served up four plates of macaroni and called her family to the table, Stott came out of his bedroom with a headache. At the table Marty was whistling and Stott rapped him on the head with a spoon.

Halfway through the meal, Stott told Jemmy to quit school. She was pouring milk when he said it and her hand did not falter.

"This is your twelfth year of school," he said, "and I don't see where it's getting us. It's time you stayed home. Candy needs somebody to get her off to school in the morning. Get her fixed up decent. Drive her to school in the Dodge. I can't always be getting up in the dark, looking after the whole pack of you. It isn't good for my breathing, getting out in the cold air. If the truth was known, I might have the same ailment your mother had, and not know it. And she died of it."

Stott rarely spoke at length, and his two little ones, wearing their jackets at the table, watched him. He spoke to the light bulb hanging on a cord over the table.

"So it's settled then" he continued, talking to Jemmy but not looking at her. "Signed, sealed and settled. You've got the responsibility around here now. Take the car in the morning. Drop Candy off at reservation school, then go to town and quit school. Be sure you get a refund on your lunch ticket. And have two dollars worth of gas put in the car. They'll charge it at Texaco."

Stott brough this gaze down from the light bulb and looked at Jemmy. The two little ones followed his eyes and saw that Jemmy was studying them, looking from one to the other, as though she never saw them before.

"Well," said Stott.

"Well what?" said Jemmy. She stood and took her plate of macaroni to the garbage sack by the sink.

"It's settled then."

Jemmy filled the sink with hot water from the kettle on the range and waited for the three of them to finish eating. She looked out the window where dusk was falling on a field of weeds and on the pine forest beyond.

"There's things to be done here," Stott said to her back. "As soon as you quit tomorrow, get home here and start shortening Candy's dresses. Nobody in first grade wears dresses as long as hers."

"Nobody wears dresses but the teacher," said Marty, grinning.

Stott left the table and settled down in the front room to watch television, but he couldn't rest easy. He wondered what Jemmy's silence meant. He imagined her standing in the kitchen, building up steam until she exploded, like the time she caught him stealing cigarettes from the bedroom she shared with Candy. On the other hand, she might simply be taking it in her stride, the way she took her mother's death. He recalled standing in the cemetery four years ago, watching his children as the preacher blessed the grave. Not one of them shed a tear. Nobody else did either, his wife's relatives having gradually drawn away from her after she married a white man, and Stott himself saving his sorrow for later in the day when he could do it justice at the bar in Rock's Place on Basswood Corner.

Hearing the rattle of dishes, Stott concluded that Jemmy was taking it in stride, but he couldn't relax. He rose from the couch and hurried through the kitchen, where Jemmy was slouched over the sink absently washing a plate and the little ones were kicking each other under the table. He took the denim jacket off the nail by the door and left the house.

THE NEXT MORNING the ground was white with an inch of snow, but the sky was clear, and again the sun and the school bus appeared on the horizon together. In the kitchen Jemmy waited until the bus driver honked four times and drove away without her before she called Marty and Candy away from television. She found the denim jacket on the floor and followed the little ones outside. Marty ran to the car and locked out Candy. Jemmy unlocked the car with the key and, reaching into the back seat, she slapped Marty.

"Fat whore," he said, his cheek stinging. He bounced on the seat, grinning, too proud to rub his cheek, and he ducked when Jemmy swung at him again.

Jemmy settled herself behind the wheel and with Candy

sitting beside her she started the car. With the engine idling she shot her hand over the back of the seat and grabbed Marty by surprise. He struggled and shouted as she dragged him out and dropped him in the snow. She got back in the car and drove around the jackpine tree and down the driveway with Marty running to catch up and cursing her as he lost ground.

At Basswood Corner Jemmy stopped in front of the schoolhouse and let Candy out. "No reason you can't walk home after school," Jemmy told her. "The walk never hurt me, not even in the first grade." Candy stood looking back down the road at Marty, a speck. Jemmy noticed that in the sunlight Candy's hair was more red than black.

"Get going now," she said, and she watched Candy, in a long dress, and Candy's girlfriends, all in slacks, file into the schoolhouse. Then she turned the car around and drove back the way she had come, toward Willowby. Marty, scuffling along in the snow, saw her coming and stuck out his tongue and crossed his eyes. Jemmy stepped on the brakes and he scampered off down the road. Then she speeded up and all the way to town she raised off the road a cloud of snow powder that glinted in the climbing sun.

In Willowby, afraid of attracting attention with the Dodge, Jemmy did not park near the high school. She left the car on Main Street and walked to school.

The halls were crowded and she had to force her way through the loud, milling students to her locker. She opened the padlock and drew out her purse. It was a large leather purse with long fringes and a long shoulder strap, which she had bought the year before with her lunch money and which she never took home, for fear of what her father would say. Over the summer, rather than keep it at home, she lent it to Roxanne Rock, who lived in the house trailer behind Rock's Place. She hung the denim jacket in the locker and went to the principal's office, a place she had never been.

"I have to quit school," she said to the secretary, who was examining a dozen pencils in a neat row on her desk.

"Have you seen the nurse?"

"No," said Jemmy.

The secretary carefully selected the sharpest pencil and scratched her scalp with it. "See her first," she said. "Then come back. She has to clear you."

Through an open door behind the secretary Jemmy could see the principal sitting at a littered desk, a phone to his ear. She remembered him from the annual assembly of Indian students, where he made a plea for steady attendance, explaining

that the school district depended on it for its full quota of state and federal aid. She also knew him from the time he had come out of the woods behind her house carrying a shotgun, looking for mallards in the creek, and her father had chased him away as a trespasser.

As the principal held the phone, his eye wandered to Jemmy, whom he did not know from the other Indian girls in his school. The sight disturbed him. That dress, he thought. That stringy hair. What were the home-economics teachers doing with their time, anyhow, that a girl her age should come to school sloppy as a freshman? And the health teacher. Wasn't a girl's health teacher supposed to keep her healthy looking? Jemmy turned and the principal watched her leave the office. The calves of her legs were dirty.

In the nurse's office a girl younger than Jemmy sat at a desk snapping her gum. She looked Jemmy over.

"I'm supposed to see the nurse," Jemmy said. "I have to quit school."

"You seen a doctor?" the girl asked, her eyes on Jemmy's stomach.

"No."

"Nurse ain't in. Be in at nine-thirty." The clock behind the desk said eight-thirty.

"Either sit down and wait or get to your first-hour class," the girl said around her gum. "You got those two choices. I report misconduct. I belong to Future Teachers."

Jemmy left the office. The halls were empty now, the lights gleaming in the polished granite.

In the girls rest room Roxanne Rock was looking at her pimples in a mirror. Jemmy came in and they glanced at each other in the mirror, but said nothing. Jemmy stepped into a compartment and latched the door. She dug a cigarette out of her purse and waited to hear Roxanne leave before lighting it.

"Give me one and I won't tell," said Roxanne, after pretending to leave and then hearing the strike of a match.

Jemmy handed a cigarette under the compartment door.

"Give me two and I won't tell," said Roxanne.

"I've only got one more," said Jemmy. "Go beg from somebody else."

"Give me half of it then."

Jemmy tore her last cigarette in two and handed half under the door and put the other half back in her purse. It really wasn't a bad price, she thought, for a full hour of peace and quiet. She heard Roxanne enter the next compartment.

"What class you supposed to be in?" asked Jemmy.

"No class. I'm working in the hot lunch room."

"I'm quitting school today," said Jemmy.

"I know it. I knew it first thing this morning."

"How did you know? You didn't either know."

"I knew because your dad told my dad last night in the store."

They smoked in silence for a minute, then, hearing Roxanne leave her compartment, Jemmy said, "I don't mind quitting. It's all right with me."

Ready to leave the rest room, poised with her hand on the door, Roxanne said, "My dad says your dad needs you at home because he's drunk all the time and he can't even feed himself. Half breed!" She hurried out.

Jemmy opened her compartment and ran to the door as it was closing and shouted "Squaw!" into the hallway. Besides Roxanne, the principal was out there.

Roxanne reappeared at the door and called to Jemmy. "Mr. Langer wants to see you. He says come out."

Jemmy ran water over her cigarette, dropped it in the towel basket and left the rest room.

"Were you smoking in there?" asked the principal. His face was gray like his hair, with a lot of loose flesh under his chin.

Jemmy gave him a guilty smile.

"Yes or no?"

Jemmy nodded, smiling. Roxanne Rock slipped around a corner and ran to the hot lunch room.

"Have you ever taken home-ec?" His look was more worried than stern.

Jemmy nodded.

"Well, what about health?"

Jemmy nodded.

"This year?"

"I had health every year."

He couldn't very well ask why, if she had these courses, she looked such a mess, but that's what he wanted to know. After a long pause he said, "Where do you belong this hour?"

"History."

"You belong in history. Whose history?"

"Olson's."

"Mr. Olson's."

Jemmy nodded.

"Get to history then. You're late." He watched to see that she went to the proper room.

Jemmy opened the door of her history class and saw Mr.

Olson writing on the blackboard. She hurried to her seat in the front row. She was wearing faded denim jeans which were tight and unfashionably short, and Morrie Benjamin, who sat across the aisle from her, said with a deep laugh, "Look at that wiggle."

Mr. Olson turned from the board and, over the chuckling of the class, he told Morrie to settle down.

"But, Mr. Olson," said Morrie, earnestly looking through strings of hair, "Jemmy's wiggle is going down in history. It's the American Indian Movement."

The class laughed for nearly a minute. Rather than try to raise his voice above the noise, Mr. Olson waited it out. He was a small man, always perfectly dressed, who habitually clutched his lapels and stretched himself to a height of five and a half feet. Jemmy knew him as a man who smiled easily, a kindly man so unlike her father that he was often on her mind, like a friend.

"All right," he said when he judged he could be heard. He couldn't. He looked at Jemmy and she smiled at him.

Finally, when the laughter wore out, he pointed to the board and said, "All right, copy these names in your notebooks under the heading 'Prominent Leaders of the American Revolution.'" As he turned to add more names to the list, Morrie Benjamin leaned across the aisle and snatched Jemmy's purse from under her desk. He handed it behind him to Scott Forster, who, instead of passing it on as Morrie expected, turned it upside down and emptied it over Morrie's head. Swinging around in a rage, Morrie hit Scott in the nose. Mr. Olson turned from the board in time to see Scott fall out of his desk and to see Jemmy claw at Morrie's face. She stung Morrie's cheek, but her fingernails were chewed too short to draw blood. Turning to face the class, Morrie crossed his eyes for laughs.

"All right," said Mr. Olson. "Quiet down!"

Scott Forster rose from the floor and stalked out of the room, trying to hold the blood in his nose. At the sight of blood the class was silent.

"When will you children grow up?" Mr. Olson trembled with anger.

Jemmy knelt on the floor to pick up her things: her purse, half a cigarette, lipstick, a stick of gum, a comb. Morrie Benjamin found her coin purse lying on his desk and put it in his pocket.

"When will you grow up?" Mr. Olson repeated.

"In our own good time," said Morrie in an irritated tone, as though he resented questions so elementary. "Don't rush us."

Laughter again, led by the hooting and clapping of a near-sighted boy in the back row who said "Amen."

Mr. Olson went to the door, beckoning for Morrie to follow. Morrie turned in his desk, his back to the door. The class grew silent again, sensing a showdown.

"Get busy in your notebooks," said Mr. Olson, and returning to Morrie's desk he said, "I would like to speak with you in the hall."

"Say it here." Morrie's eyes were on the ceiling. "Save us both the trouble of going out in the hall."

"Do you know what kind of trouble you could get into with talk like that?"

"You threatening to tell the principal?"

"Only as a last resort."

"You threatening to give me a red F in conduct?"

"I want to speak to you in the hall."

"You go on ahead if you want. I'll be out there when the bell rings," said Morrie.

Mr. Olson backed away and looked over his class. He rapped on the blackboard and stirred them to life. Some began copying down the names. "American Revolution," he said and was about to say it again when Morrie spoke up.

"I'm not afraid of anything you might threaten me with. I'm alone and beyond reach." He seemed to be speaking from his soul. His classmates gazed at him. "I have nothing more to lose. The worst has already happened to me." His voice broke on *happened*. His friends exchanged quick smiles.

"Keep it to yourself," said Mr. Olson. He saw their smiles and was wary.

"It's almost a relief to know that whatever life has in store for me, it cannot be as tragic as what I've been through."

Jemmy gave up looking for her coin purse on the floor and climbed back to her desk.

"I might as well tell you, Mr. Olson, in front of everyone," said Morrie. "We're all friends here. I have nothing to hide. I might as well tell you straight out—Jemmy Stott doesn't love me any more."

The hour ended with a wave of laughter and stomping and clapping that nearly drowned out the ringing of the bell.

Jemmy hurried out of the room and down the hall through the crush of students to the nurse's office. The girl at the desk pointed to an inner room where Jemmy found the nurse. She had a heavily painted face and a high pile of red hair, to which was pinned a tiny white cap like a toy sailboat.

"Yes?" she said.

"I'm supposed to see you, I have to quit school."

The nurse came around her desk with her hands out. "My

poor girl. Come and sit down. Have you seen a doctor?"

"No."

"We'll make an appointment. Sit here. I know how troubled you are. I see it in your face."

They both sat on a bench and the nurse gave Jemmy a smile full of pity. Her mouth, with purple lipstick, was the color of an old scar.

"Talking about it openly is the best way. Any number of girls will tell you that. Now let's take it one step at a time. First, will the boy marry you?"

"What boy?"

The nurse looked as if she had been tricked. Her smile disappeared and her eyes narrowed.

"Why must you quit school?"

"I have to keep house. Dad says."

The nurse felt cheated. Childless herself, caring for unwed mothers was her specialty. Every girl who had a baby under her direction made her twice a mother.

"That's the entire reason?"

"Yes."

"You have no mother to keep house?"

"No."

"Died? Or ran away?"

"Died."

"Do you want to quit school?"

Jemmy shrugged and looked at her lap.

"Do you want to keep house?"

"I don't care. Dad says."

"What year are you?"

"Senior."

"How old?"

"Seventeen."

"Will you come back sometime and finish school?" She had to know in order to use an inter-office memo pad of the proper color, pink for temporary withdrawal, yellow for permanent.

Jemmy shrugged again.

The nurse tore off a yellow slip and initialed it. "All right, go back to the principal's secretary. Give her this and ask for a withdrawal card."

Jemmy nodded and stood up. As she left, the nurse said, "Why don't you Indians ever finish school?"

Jemmy shrugged. "Roxanne Rock will finish," she said.

The halls were empty and quiet again. She went to the principal's office with the yellow slip, and while the secretary searched the files for her folder Jemmy looked through the open

door to the principal's desk. He was seated there again and he was talking to someone Jemmy couldn't see, but she could hear what they were saying and she recognized the voice of Mr. Olson.

"I'm afraid my eight-thirty class is going down the drain."

"Too early in the year to say that," said the principal. "Drains aren't open this early in the year." He chuckled.

"I've been with that class for six weeks and it never gets any better. It's my worst ever."

"Who's in it?"

"Morrie Benjamin. Scott Forster. Jimmy Hoover. That whole bunch."

"Familiar names. They come to my attention now and then. They're all capable of a little hellraising, but they're not all leaders. Find the ringleader and subdue him and your problem is solved."

"I know the ringleader. It's Morrie Benjamin."

"Fine. Swell. That's half your problem solved right there. Now subdue him."

"How?"

"You're the teacher."

"But what do you advise?"

"I've given you my advice. Beyond that, you know the student better than I do. You know what there is about him that irritates you. Figure out an agreement you can both live with. Take the boy aside."

Finding Jemmy's records, the secretary sat at her desk and typed the date on a card.

"Gemstone Onal Stott?" she asked without looking up.

Jemmy said that was right and the secretary typed it on the card, then handed it to her.

"Show this card to each of your teachers except study hall teachers and bring it back signed by all of them. Turn in your books to each teacher and clean out your locker. You will make restitution for books torn, written in, or otherwise damaged. You must get the signature of the librarian. If you ever return to school, you will enter under your present name. No name changes until after you re-enroll. Sneak well of Willowby High School and be grateful for what it has done for you."

"I've got half the nunches left on my lunch ticket," said Jemmy. She handed it to the secretary, who unlocked a cash drawer.

"I haven't met a student yet who wouldn't negotiate," the principal was saying. "Except for Indians. You can't negotiate with Indians because they never say anything."

"Negotiate!" said Mr. Olson. "The agreement is that I am

to teach American history and the student is to learn American history. What is there to negotiate?"

"There's always a bargain to be struck, Olson. Last year we had Harrison, you remember, the weakest Latin teacher we ever had—couldn't teach a dog to bark. He had a kid in class that kept him uneasy all the time. You know the kind of kid, forever talking under his breath to no one in particular. Now Harrison worked out what I call a reasonable compromise. He allowed the kid to sleep in class every day and the kid, in turn, agreed to be quiet every day, even when he wasn't sleepy. You see, the kid was bored with Latin—and I can't say I blame him for that—and he sought diversion by talking under his breath. But once he had permission to sleep, his boredom was no longer a problem. A bargain was struck."

Mr. Olson emerged and walked through the outer office. "I'm late for second hour," he said over his shoulder. He didn't notice Jemmy.

The principal stood in his office doorway and called after him. "I could tell you about Dallas Purvis. He taught math for me when I was principal at Prairie City. He could identify ringleaders and work out a bargain the first day of school."

Mr. Olson was gone, and the principal told the rest to Jemmy:

"He just took the ringleader aside and talked it over. It was from Dallas Purvis I learned about bargaining with students. You might think I got it from books, but no, I got it from Dallas Purvis."

"Two thirty-five," said the secretary, counting out Jemmy's refund. "You might have to return it, and more, if you've damaged any books."

Jemmy took all the books from her locker and made the rounds, interrupting classes. Her remedial math teacher said good luck, her health teacher said good luck, her bookkeeping teacher said good luck, the librarian said nothing, and her English teacher said, "What do all you Indians do out there on the reservation?" They all wore the same grim expression, as though Jemmy were a worry they would be glad to forget.

Jemmy saved Mr. Olson till last.

"You're quitting, Jemmy? Because of what happened in class?"

Jemmy shook her head, smiling. She never looked at him without smiling. "Dad says."

"But you're a senior."

Jemmy nodded.

"He needs you at home?"

She nodded.

"I hope it's the right thing you're doing." He signed the card and gave her the smile she expected. "Good luck, Jemmy."

She returned to her locker and put on the denim jacket. From the floor of her locker she gathered up discarded potato chip sacks and candy bar wrappers. She crumpled them into two wads and stuffed them into the pockets of her jacket.

She took the withdrawal card into the office and when she came out classes were changing again. She pushed her way through the warmth and noise and smell and jostling of high school to the front door, where stepping outside was like coming in out of a wind. The neighborhood around the school was asleep in the still sunshine. She put the strap of her fringed purse over her shoulder, turned up the sleeves of her jacket so the frayed cuffs wouldn't show, and under the bare trees that lined the street she walked uptown. She noticed that the only snow left was in the shade of houses.

On Main Street she went into the Heap Big Discount Store where she dug through a pile of sale items on a table and found a pair of jeans that looked to be Candy's size. She had planned to buy two pair, but she had lost her coin purse. At the check-out counter she paid for the jeans with her lunch-ticket refund and had enough money left for a package of cigarettes.

She crossed the street to the old Dodge, and after starting it she sat for a minute listening to the clatter of the engine, as she had seen her father do before putting it in gear.

To avoid the bus route, the road she had traveled twice a day for over three years, she took the longer way home, driving slowly and looking at houses and woods and ponds she had never seen before.

She lost her way. Along a narrow road with no mailboxes, she followed a string of small lakes that stretched for several miles into the pine forest. On the sparkling water flocks of teal were alighting and rising, prompted by the snow to fly south, but undecided now that the day was turning warm. Free of school, Jemmy felt as light as the rising teal, and being lost did not worry her. She knew that every road led somewhere. She drove steadily on until, halfway up a hill, between a rocky clearing and a tumbledown barn, the Dodge ran out of gas.

Tabitha and Miss Kite

NANCY PENCE

As March huffed out, a blizzard sealed their doors,
Yet for some meager weeks after that blast,
Peering through ferns and stained-glass panels,
They named ambiguous streets heartless and rude
Like their metallic deer cropping the frost.
But when fat chimney smoke had whittled down
to question marks and shutters banged all night,
Neighbors inquired: the stoic purse of need
Snapped reason tight and darkened every room.
So, Ralph, Tabitha's nephew, paid his call.
He broke the lock, hoping eccentric stoves
Might wink at him from the red eyes of age.
He found two corpses in this wintry hoard:
A heaped up parcel thick with dollar bills,
The food and drink untouched, each counted log
Cold from refusal and by the barren hearth
A sleek, inherited portrait of himself.

Marginalia . . .

(continued)

The *Scarlet Letter* did not fare badly. An astute reviewer in *The Literary World* (March 3, 1850) said: "It is a drama in which thoughts are acts. The material has been thoroughly fused in the writer's mind, and springs forth an entire perfect creation." But guardians of the public morality found much to upset them in the work. "There is an unsound state of public morals," wrote Orestes Brownson in *Brownson's Review*, "when the novelist is permitted, without a scorching rebuke, to select such crimes, and to invest them with all the fascination of genius, and all the claims of a highly-polished style."

The tragic failure of *Moby Dick* in its original publication is of course well known. The book never recovered from its initial reception until years after Melville died, thinking himself a failure as a novelist. The venom of the reviews must have been shattering to the young author who was hoping to recover the magic touch that had brought him success with *Typee*.

(Continued on Page 52)

The book was published first in England under the title, The Whale. An initially favorable response was soon superseded by such comments as these in The Athenaeum (Oct. 25, 1851): "Mr. Melville has to thank himself only if his horrors and heroics are flung aside by the general reader as so much trash . . ." When the book appeared in America, the reviewer from the Boston Post found it not worth its price (\$1.50). "Published at 25 cents it might do to buy, but at any higher price, we think it a poor speculation." It remained for the Democratic Review to apply the final rites: "Typee and Omoo were Mr. Melville's triumphs, Redburn was a stupid failure, Mardi was hopelessly dull, White Jacket was worse than either; and in fact, it was such a very bad book, that, until the appearance of Moby Dick, we had set it down as the very ultimatum of weakness to which the author could attain. It seems, however, that we were mistaken. In bombast, in caricature, in rhetorical artifice . . . and in low attempts at humor, each of his volumes has been an advance upon its predecessors." Could John Simon have said it better?

Huckleberry Finn was published in February, 1885. Aside from a favorable review in the Century Magazine, it was either ignored or attacked as scandalous and irreverent, a threat to the morals of the young. In that citadel of America's literary greats, Concord, Mass., it was banned from the Public Library, the board members describing it as "the veriest trash." Life published a sarcastic review which focused on the grim quality of Twain's humor, and the Boston Transcript concluded that the novel was "so flat, as well as coarse, that nobody wants to read it after a taste of it."

The track record of book reviewers has not been all bad, certainly not as bad as the above excerpts might suggest, but it hasn't been much better than that of most handicappers. You could probably do as well picking books by the color of their jackets. And if you're waiting for us to help you out with reviews, I'm afraid you'll have to pick your own winners. Madame Sosostriis regrets.

—J.J.K.

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